



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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NORTHERN ARIZONA MAN SENTENCED FOR STARTING THE 2004 CHINA FIRE

PHOENIX—Darren Burnette, 20, of the White Mountain Apache Reservation, was sentenced here on Wednesday, June 21st to four months in prison by U.S. Magistrate Judge Virginia Mathis. Burnette pleaded guilty on January 11, 2006 to a misdemeanor of starting the China Fire (near the China Town community on the White Mountain Indian Reservation) on June 22, 2004. He was also ordered by the judge to self-surrender to the U.S. Marshal's Service by noon on July 5, 2006.

According to court documents, Burnette was tending his marijuana plant and had gotten "high." He decided to "play with matches" and deliberately set a twig on fire. He then dropped the twig on the ground and believed he put out the resulting small fire. However, after he left the area the nearby grass ignited and consumed approximately several hundred acres, causing residents to evacuate their homes for up to five days. Burnette initially lied to investigators about his involvement and even tried to blame the fire on an 8-year-old child.

The investigation preceding the indictment was conducted by White Mountain Apache Tribal Police, FBI/Safe Trails Task Force and the Ft. Apache Agency of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The prosecution is being handled by Vincent Kirby, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-05-530-PCT-JAT
RELEASE NUMBER: 2006-107(Burnette)

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